

REMARKS

Paragraphs 1 and 11 of the Specification are objected to for specified informalities. These objections are overcome by the amendments to the specification.

Claims 2-5 and 7 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph for lack of antecedent basis for "the textured cover" and "the form". This rejection is overcome by the amendments to claims 1 and 6.

Claims 1-5 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over *Bucalo* (U.S. 3,842,166) in view of *Sheldon* (U.S. 4,650,459). Claims 6 and 7 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over *Bucalo* in view of *Sheldon*, as applied to claim 1 above, and further in view of *Buck et al.* (U.S. 5,725,481). These rejections are respectfully traversed on the grounds that these references are defective in establishing a *prima facie* case of obviousness.

There must be a basis, incentive, motivation in the art for combining the references.

Webster's dictionary defines a frame as "parts fitted together and united" and "a construction system that gives shape or strength", whereas a mesh is defined as "a woven knit or knotted fabric of open texture with evenly spaced small holes".

Independent claims 1 and 6 each include: "a textured flexible mesh covering the absorbent member," i.e., a mesh is inherently flexible. *Bucalo* teaches a metal or plastic frame, i.e. a frame is inherently rigid. *Sheldon* teaches an application used as an insertion device. However, in the Applicant's device, a flexible mesh sleeve is used

to enhance comfort not provided to a user by a rigid frame (see the Applicants' specification and the drawings).

As the PTO recognizes in MPEP § 2142:

...The Examiner bears the initial burden of factually supporting any *prima facie* conclusion of obviousness. If the Examiner does not produce a *prima facie* case, the Applicant is under no obligation to submit evidence of nonobviousness.....the Examiner must step backward in time and into the shoes worn by the hypothetical 'person of ordinary skill in the art' when the invention was unknown and just before it was made....The Examiner must put aside knowledge of the Applicant's disclosure, refrain from using hindsight, and consider the subject matter claimed 'as a whole.'"

The Federal Circuit has, on many occasions, held that there was no basis for combining references to support a 35 U.S.C. §103 rejection. For example, in *In re Geiger*, the court stated in holding that the PTO "failed to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness":

Obviousness cannot be established by combining the teachings of the prior art to produce the claimed invention, absent some teaching, suggestion or incentive supporting the combination. *ACS Hospital Systems, Inc. v. Monteffiore Hospital*, 732 F.2d 1572, 1577, 221 USPQ 929, 933 (Fed. Cir. 1984)

The Federal Circuit has also repeatedly warned against using the Applicant's disclosure as a blueprint to reconstruct the claimed invention out of isolated teachings in the prior art. See e.g., *Grain Processing Corp. v. American Maize-Products*, 840 F.2d 902, 907, 5 USPQ2d 1798, 1792 (Fed. Cir. 1989).

More recently, the Federal Circuit found motivation absent in *In re Rouffet*, 149 F.3d 1350, 47 USPQ2d 1453 (Fed. Cir. 1998). In this case, the court concluded that the board had "reversibly erred in determining that one of [ordinary] skill in the art would have been motivated to combine these references in a manner that rendered the

claimed invention [to have been] obvious.” The court noted that to “prevent the use of hindsight based on the invention to defeat patentability of the invention, this court requires the Examiner to show a motivation to combine the references that create the case of obviousness.” The court further noted that there were three possible sources for such motivation, namely “(1) the nature of the problem to be solved; (2) the teachings of the prior art; and (3) the knowledge of persons of ordinary skill in the art.” Here, according to the court, the board had relied simply upon “the high level of skill in the art to provide the necessary motivation,” without explaining what specific understanding or technological principle within the knowledge of one of ordinary skill in the art would have suggested the combination. Notably, the court wrote: “If such a rote invocation could suffice to supply a motivation to combine, the more sophisticated scientific fields would rarely, if ever, experience a patentable technical advance.”

Therefore, there is simply no basis in the art for combining the references to support a 35 U.S.C. § 103 rejection because none of the references teach or even suggest the desirability of the combination. Moreover, none of the references provide any incentive or motivation supporting the desirability of the combination.

The MPEP § 2143.01 provides:

The mere fact that references can be combined or modified does not render the resultant combination obvious unless the prior art also suggests the desirability of the combination. *In re Mills*, 916 F.2d 680, 16 USPQ2d 1430 (Fed. Cir. 1990).

Therefore, the Examiner's combination arises solely from hindsight based on the invention without any showing of suggestion, incentive or motivation in either reference of the combination.

All claim limitations must be considered.

As the PTO recognizes in MPEP §2142:

... The Examiner bears the initial burden of factually supporting any *prima facie* conclusion of obviousness. If the Examiner does not produce a *prima facie* case, the Applicant is under no obligation to submit evidence of nonobviousness...

Thus, the rejection is improper because, when evaluating a claim for determining obviousness, all limitations of the claim must be evaluated. In this context, 35 USC §103 provides that:

A patent may not be obtained...if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the *subject matter* as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which the subject matter pertains... (Emphasis added)

The Federal Circuit has held that a reference did not render the claimed combination *prima facie* obvious in *In re Fine*, 873 F.2d 1071, 5 USPQ2d 1596 (Fed. Cir. 1988), because inter alia, the Examiner ignored a material, claimed, temperature limitation which was absent from the reference. In variant form, the Federal Circuit held in *In re Evanega*, 829 F.2d 1110, 4 USPQ2d 1249 (Fed. Cir. 1987), that there was want of *prima facie* obviousness in that:

The mere absence [from the reference] of an explicit requirement [of the claim] cannot reasonably be construed as an affirmative statement that [the requirement is in the reference].

In *Jones v. Hardy*, 727 F.2d 1524, 220 USPQ 1021 (Fed. Cir 1984), the Federal Circuit reversed a district court holding of invalidity of patents and held that:

The "difference" may have seemed slight (as has often been the case with some of history's great inventions, e.g., the telephone) but it may also have been the key to success and advancement in the art resulting from the invention. Further, it is irrelevant in determining obviousness that all or all other aspects of the claim may have been well known in the art.

The Federal Circuit has also continually cautioned against myopic focus on the obviousness of the difference between the claimed invention and the prior art rather than on the obviousness *vel non* of the claimed invention as a whole relative to the prior art as §103 requires. See, e.g., *Hybritech Inc. v. Monoclonal Antibodies, Inc.* 802 F.2d 1367, 1383, 231 USPQ 81, 93 (Fed. Cir. 1986).

Because all the limitations of independent claims 1 and 6 have not been met by the references, it is impossible to render the subject matter as a whole obvious. Thus, the explicit terms of the statutes have not been met and the Examiner has not borne the initial burden of factually supporting any *prima facie* conclusion of obviousness.


Therefore, independent claims 1 and 6 and the claims dependent therefrom are submitted to be allowable.

In view of the above, it is respectfully submitted that remaining claims 1 and 3-8 are in condition for allowance. Accordingly, an early Notice of Allowance is courteously solicited.

Claims 1, 2, 6 and 7 are rejected under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting as being unpatentable over claims 1, 2, 4 and 5-9 of U.S. Patent Nos. 6,702,759. Although Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection, Applicant submits herewith a terminal disclaimer under 37 CFR 1.321 to obviate the double patenting rejection and expedite prosecution of the application.

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Respectfully submitted,


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